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Home > Newsroom > Press Releases > 2015 > Governor Christie: People Who Suffer From Addiction Too Often Hide In The Shadows

# Governor Christie: People Who Suffer From Addiction Too Often Hide In The Shadows

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Gov. Christie: People Who Suffer From Addiction Too Often Hide ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56s3eNfOO6Y>

### Transcript:

**Governor Christie:** Now where's the lady who held up a sign saying "pick me"? I usually don't encourage type of bad behavior but I'm going to do it. So you said pick me, you'll be the last question today. By the way everybody, remember when I did this. This could wind up being really good or really bad, whenever I do this it goes either way. So go ahead.

**Susan Keta:** I just have to say I've never gotten in trouble before so you're my first reprimand. But anyway, my name is Susan Keta and I am from Warren County. I'm a member of NAMI Warren County, The National Alliance on Mental Illness, and I am a mom. I have a 31 year old daughter who has suffered from mental illness since she was young and as she grew up, she started to use drugs to stop the tornado in her head. She has been at Warren County Correctional Facility, she had Drug Court- failed drug court- ended up at Edna Mahan for three years in the mental health section. Recently she maxed out last year and ended up in, and then in the fall, this past fall she tried to commit suicide and ended up in Greystone. And I am her mom, I am her advocate and I'm here for her. And I noticed that you created a Facing Addiction Task Force to fight addiction. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

**Governor Christie:** Sure, first off there have been few things that I've cared about more or worked on harder in my time as Governor than what you're talking about. Because I really believe that both, that drug addiction, the same as other mental illnesses, is an illness. And we need to stop looking at it as a moral failing and start looking at it as an illness that we need to try to treat. And everybody makes bad choices and bad decisions in our lives. All of us do, and

we've been lucky, most of us, that those bad choices and bad decisions have not led to a life of addiction. And so for your daughter, I am sorry that she failed out of Drug Court. Drug Court is one of the things we've done to try to expand access for folks who are non-violent offenders, as it sounds like your daughter is, to give them the tools they need to be able to try to deal with their addiction. One of the other problems with dealing with this issue is, as you know, there's enormous stigma that's attached to this. People don't want to talk about it. Because we still kind of gauge drug addiction as a moral failing and not as an illness. There's not stigma attached to cancer, there's not stigma attached to heart disease. You know, some people may look at you and say well you didn't eat well, or you were a smoker. But no one says to you then - like you're kind of getting what you deserve. People say no, go get treatment. Try to cure your cancer, go try to cure your heart disease. Give you medicine, try to help you. We don't have the same feeling in large parts of the society about drug addiction and alcohol addiction. We somehow think that, because they made the choice. And that's a false idea as well because lots of people just have an addictive personality and it's genetic, that we need to deal with this differently. So for the Facing Addiction Task Force has been put together and is working to develop programs that not only compliment what we have already in terms of giving people treatment for these problems, but also holding public events that begin to lower the stigma. I think the more prominent people in our society talk about this, the better chance we have at lowering the stigma and letting more people come out and ask for help. A lot of times people who have this problem, as you know, hide in the shadows. They don't want to ask for help because they're made to feel like failures and they're not happy with themselves either. And when you talked about, with what you're saying too, when you combine mental illness with this, which often happens - it was a great way you put it, the torrent that was going on in your daughter's head, combined with the addiction, is an extraordinarily difficult problem to deal with. So what we're trying to do is to make treatment more available for folks and we're being successful with that. The Drug Court program has been phased in across the entire state over five years. We're three years into that, because we need to continue to develop more facilities that can take the increased number of people. And more folks at the law enforcement level to be able to deal with this as well and we're trying to make sure that we talk about this publically as much as possible to deal with the stigma issue. The last thing I'll say to you is this, that what we need to understand as a society, in my opinion is that, there but for the grace of God go I. Any of these people who find themselves in this position- it could be me or you, it could be your son or daughter, your grandson or granddaughter, your niece or nephew, your husband or wife, your brother or your sister. This is without regard to education, economic status, success in your employment. It affects everyone in this society and we cannot just throw these people in jail. It does no good everybody. Listen, if they're violent they need to go in jail. We can't have violent people on our streets attacking innocent folks. But so many of the folks that we put in prison now are non-violent. They're just addicted and they do petty crimes to support their addiction. We need as a society to understand that this could happen to anyone. And I will tell you that, for me, and I've told this story a number of times and I'll tell it again today. So you understand that I do understand this. A good friend of mine who I went to law school with. He was one of my close friends in law school. He was the smartest of the group of us, who studied together, we had as study group. He's the first one who went out and got a really good job, he was one of the editors of the Law Review at Seton Hall. He then went out, he was the first one of the group of us who became a partner in his firm. He married a beautiful woman, who was a doctor, they have three beautiful daughters. This great career. He was an avid runner, great shape and he was running 15-20 miles a week and he wound up hurting his back from running so much. So he went to the doctor and the doctor gave him Percocet. He started taking Percocet, and then OxyContin, and then Percocet and OxyContin with vodka. And this friend of mine, who was handsome, successful, ivy-league educated undergrad. One of the top people in our class, in our law school class. One of the most successful lawyers I know, with a beautiful home in New Jersey and a great career and an incredible wife and beautiful daughters, became an addict. And we intervened, his friends. We went and we had an intervention. His wife came to us and said he won't listen to me, you guys need to talk to him, you're his friends forever. So we all went and he was living someplace else and we went and we intervened with him. We got him into treatment a number of different times over a ten year period of time and nothing worked. And a year ago, last week, I got the call on a Sunday morning that I dreaded I was going to get for ten years. That they found him in a hotel room with an empty bottle of Percocet and an empty quart of vodka, dead. He had been divorced, he couldn't see his children, he lost his job, he lost his driver's license, he blew through his retirement money and he was living in some hotel and wound up dead. If you looked at this person from the outside you would say, how? You had everything. Everything that our society values, you had it. What are you doing? We said this to him. And we said this to him because we didn't understand. It's addiction. It's an illness. And even when we got him the tools to try to deal with it, he couldn't. You know, there but for the grace of God go I. This is a disease that is going to destroy our country, if we continue to force these folks into the shadow and make them feel morally inferior for being ill. And so I'm going to continue to talk about it and do things about it because I want your daughter to have a chance to enjoy the life that you gave her. And for those folks, you know and I'm one of them whose pro-life, let me tell you something everybody pro-life means being pro-life for the whole life. It's easy - Now, my wife says I say this cause I've never been pregnant, but I say it's easy when they're in the womb. She says, not so much. But it gets a lot more complicated when they get out and when they make decisions that are bad ones and they disappoint you and they scare you. And the 16 year old on the floor of a county jail cell drug addicted, that life is just as precious as the life in the womb. The life of your daughter, with all the difficulties you just chronicled she has is still an individual gift from god. And we better start thinking that way as a society because if we don't the next person could be our son or daughter. And we'll never think that life is worthless when it's our son or daughter. How can we possibly think it when it's yours. So that's what we're trying to do. I'll be thinking of you and give you, hopefully, that god will give you the strength and the faith to be able to deal with this and to help your daughter. We're going to try to help in every way that we can and we all should be talking about this because if we do, then every life we save, every life is an individual miracle, everyone and it could happen to anybody so that's what we're trying to do that's what it's about. I want you to give your information to our folks because there's a bunch of things and a number of different ways that we can be helpful, that a lot of people don't know about because we don't talk about this enough. So we'll get one my staff to talk with you and see if there might be ways to help.

**Susan Keta:** Thank you.

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